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A LECTURE

Read at the Philosophical Society in Newcastle, on Nov. the 8th, 1775.

MR. PRESIDENT,

IT being my turn to Lecture, I beg to give some thoughts on this important question, viz. Whether mankind, in society, reap all the advantages from their natural and equal rights of property in land and liberty, which in that state they possibly may, and ought to expect? And as I hope you, Mr. President, and the good company here are sincere friends to truth, I am under no apprehensions of giving offence by defending her cause with freedom.

That property in land and liberty among men, in a state of nature, ought to be equal, few, one would fain hope, would be foolish enough to deny. Therefore, taking this to be granted the country of any people, in a native state, is property their common, in which each of them has an equal property, with free liberty to sustain himself and family with the animals, fruits, and other products thereof. Thus such a people reap jointly the whole advantages of their country, or neighbourhood, without having their right in so doing, called in question by any, not even by the most selfish and corrupt. For upon what must they live, if not upon the productions of the country in which they reside? Surely to deny them that right is, in effect, denying them a right to live.—Well, methinks some are now ready to say, but is it not lawful, reasonable, and just for this people to sell, or make a present, even of the whole of their country, or common, to whom they will, to be held by them and their heirs, even for ever?

To this I answer, If their posterity require no grosser materials to live and move upon than air, it would certainly be very ill-natured, to dispute their right of parting with what of their own

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own, their posterity would never have occasion for; but if their posterity cannot live but as grossly as they do, the same gross materials must be left them to live upon. For a right to deprive any thing of the means of living, supposes a right to deprive it of life; and this right ancestors are not supposed to have over their posterity.

Hence it is plain, that the land or earth, in any country or neighbourhood, with every thing in or on the same, or pertaining thereto, belongs at all times to the living inhabitants of the said country or neighbourhood in an equal manner. For, as I said before, there is no living but on land and its productions, consequently, what we cannot live without, we have the same property in, as in our lives.

Now, as society ought properly to be nothing but a mutual agreement among the inhabitants of a country, to maintain the natural rights and privileges of one another against all opposers, whether foreign or domestic, it should lead one to expect to find those rights and privileges no farther infringed upon among men pretending to be in that state, than necessity absolutely required. I say again, it should lead one to think so. But I am afraid, whoever does will be mightily mistaken.—However, as the truth here is of much importance to be known, let it be boldly sought out; in order to which, it may not be improper to trace the present method of holding land among men in society, from its original.

If we look back to the origin of the present nations, we shall see that the land, with all its appurtenances, was claimed by a few, and divided among themselves, in as assured a manner, as if they had manufactured it, and it had been the work of their own hands; and by being unquestioned, or not called to an account for such usurpations and unjust claims, they fell into a habit of thinking, or, which is the same thing to the rest of mankind, of acting as if the earth was made for or by them, and did not scruple to call it their own property, which they might dispose of without regard to any other living creature in the universe. According ly they did so, and no man, more than any other creature, could claim a right to so much as a blade of grass, or a nut, or an acorn, a fish or a fowl, or any natural production whatever, though to save his life, without the permission of the pretended proprietor; and not a foot of land, water, rock, or heath, but was claimed by one or other of those lords; so that all things, men as well as other creatures who lived, were obliged to owe their lives to some or other."

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to their property; consequently they too, like the brutes, were claimed; and certainly as properly as the wood, herbs, &c. that were nourished by the soil. And so we find, that whether they lived, multiplied, worked, or fought, it was all for their respective lords, and they, God bless them! most graciously accepted of all as their due. For, by granting the means of life, they granted the life itself, and of course they had a right to all the services and advantages that the life or death of the creatures they gave life to could yield.

Thus the title of gods seems suitably enough applied to such great beings: nor is it to be wondered at that no services could be thought too great by poor, dependent, needy wretches, to such mighty and all sufficient lords, in whom they seemed to live and move and have their being. Thus were the first land-holders usurpers and tyrants; and all who have since possessed their lands, have done so by right of inheritance, purchase, &c. from them; and the present proprietors, like their predecessors, are proud to own it; and like them too, they exclude all others from the least pretence to their respective properties. And any one of them still can, by laws of their own making, (for they are the landlords alone who make the laws) oblige every living creature to remove from off his property, (which, to the great distress of mankind, is too oft put in execution); so, of consequence, were all the land-holders to be of one mind, and determined to take their properties into their own hands, all the rest of mankind might go to heaven if they would, for there would be no place found for them here. Thus men may not live in any part of this world, not even where they are born, but as strangers, and by the permission of the pretender to the property thereof: which permission is for the most part paid extravagantly for, and they are still advancing the terms of permission, though many people are so straitened to pay the present demands, that it is believed in a short time, if they hold on, there will be few to grant the favour to. And those Land-makers, as we shall call them, justify all this by the practice of other manufacturers, who take all they can get for the products of their hands; and because that every one ought to live by his business as well as he can and consequently so ought Land-makers.—Now having before supposed it both proved and allowed, that mankind have as equal and just a property in land as they have in liberty, air, or the light and heat of the sun, and having also considered upon what hard conditions they enjoy those

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those common gifts of nature, it is plain they are far from reaping all the advantages from them, which they may and ought to expect.

But lest it should be said, that a system whereby they may reap more advantages, consistent with the nature of society cannot be proposed, I will attempt to shew you the outlines of such a plan.

Let it be supposed then, that the whole people in some country, after much reasoning and deliberation, should conclude, that every man has an equal property in the land in the neighbourhood where he resides. They therefore resolve, that if they live in society together, it shall only be with a view, that every one may reap all the benefits from their natural rights and privileges possible. Therefore, a day is appointed on which the inhabitants of each parish meet, in their respective parishes, to take their long-lost rights into possession, and to form themselves into corporations. So, then each parish becomes a corporation, and all the men who are inhabitants become members or burgers. The land with all that appertains to it, is in every parish, made the property of the corporation or parish, with as ample power to let, repair or alter all, or any part thereof, as a lord of the manor enjoys over his lands, houses, &c. but the power of alienating the least morsel, in any manner, from the parish, either at this or any time hereafter, is denied. For it is solemnly agreed to, by the whole nation, that a parish that shall either sell, or give away, any part of its landed property, shall be looked upon with as much horror and detestation, and used by them as if they had sold all their children to be slaves, or massacred them with their own hands. Thus are there no more lor other landlords, in the whole country than the parishes; and each of them is sovereign landlord of its own territories.

O hearken! ye besotted sons of men. By this one bold resolve your chains are eternally broken, and your enemies anihilated. By this one resolve the power, the pride, and the arrogance of the landed interest, those universal and never ceasing scourges and plunderers of your race, are instantaneously and for ever broken and cut off. For being thus deprived and shorn of their revenues, they become like shorn Sampson, weak as other men; weak as the poor dejected wretches whom they have so long been grinding and treading under foot.

There you may behold the rent, which the people have paid

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paid into the parish treasuries employed by each parish in paying the government so much per pound to make up the sum which the parliament or national representation at any time think requisite; in maintaining and relieving its own poor, and people out of work; in paying the necessary Officers their salaries; in building, repairing, and adorning its houses, bridges, and other structures; in making and maintaining convenient and delightful streets, highways, and passages both for foot and carriages; in making and maintaining canals, and other conveniences for trade and navigation; in planting and taking in waste grounds; in providing and keeping up a magazine of ammunition and all sorts of arms sufficient for all its inhabitants in case of danger from enemies; in premiums for the encouragement of agriculture, or any thing else thought worthy of encouragement; and, in a word, in doing whatever the people think proper; and not as formerly, to support and spread luxury, pride, and all manner of vice. As for corruption in elections, it has now no being or effect among them; all affairs to be determined by voting either in a full meeting of a parish, its committees, or in the house of Representatives, are done by balloting, so that votings, or elections among them, occasion no animosities, for none need to let another know for which side he votes; all that can be done, therefore, to gain a majority of votes for any thing, is to make it appear in the best light possible by speaking or writing.

Among them government does not meddle in every trifle, but on the contrary, allows to each parish the power of putting the laws in force in all cases, and does not interfere, but when they act manifestly to the prejudice of society, and the rights and liberties of mankind as established in their glorious constitution and laws. For the judgment of a parish may be as much depended upon as that of a house of lords, because they have as little to fear from speaking or voting according to truth, as they.

A certain number of neighbouring parishes, chuse delegates to represent them in Parliament, Senate, or Congress: and each of them pays equally towards their maintainance. They are chosen thus: all the candidates are proposed in every parish on the same day, when the election by balloting immediately proceeds in all the parishes at once, to prevent too great a concourse at one place, and they who are found to have the majority on a proper survey of the several poll books are acknowledged to be their representatives.

A man

A man by dwelling a whole year in any parish becomes a parishioner, or member of its corporation; and retains that privilege, till he lives a full year in some other, when he becomes a member in that parish, and immediately loses all his right to the former for ever, unless he chuse to go back and recover it, by dwelling again a full year there. Thus none can be a member of two parishes at once; and yet a man is always a member of one, though he move ever so oft.

If in any parish should be dwelling strangers from foreign nations, or people from distant parishes, who by sickness or other casualties should become so necessitous as to require relief before they have acquired a settlement by dwelling a full year therein; then this parish, as if it were their proper settlement, immediately takes them under its humane protection, and the expence thus incurred by any parish in providing for those not properly their own poor, being taken an account of, is deducted by the parish, out of the first payment made to the state. Thus poor strangers being the poor of the State, are not looked upon by their new neighbours where they have come to reside with an envious evil eye lest they should become burthensome; neither are the poor harassed about in the extremity of sickness, and perhaps in a dying condition, to gratify the litigiousness of parishes.

All the men in the parish, at times of their own chusing, repair together to a field for that purpose, with their officers, arms, banners, and all sorts of martial music, in order to learn or retain the complete art of war; there they become soldiers! Yet not to molest their neighbours unprovoked, but to be able to defend what none have a right to dispute their title to the enjoyment of; and woe be to them who occasion them to do this! they would use them worse than highwaymen, or pirates, if they got them in their power.

There is no army kept in pay among them, in times of peace; as all have a property in their country to defend, they are alike ready to run to arms when their country is in danger: and when an army is to be sent abroad, it is soon raised, of ready trained soldiers, either as volunteers, or by casting lots in each parish for so many men.

Besides, as each man has a vote in all the affairs of his parish, and for his own sake must wish well to the public, the land is let in very small farms, which makes employment for a greater number of hands, and makes more victualling of all kinds be raised.

There

There are no tolls or taxes of any kind paid among them, by native or foreigner, but the aforesaid rent. The government, poor, roads, &c. &c. as said before, are all maintained by the parishes with the rents on which account, all wares, manufactures, allowable trade, employments, or actions, are entirely duty-free. Freedom to do any thing whatever cannot there be bought; a thing is either entirely prohibited as theft or murder; or entirely free to every one without tax or price.

When houses, lands, or any tenements become vacant they are let publicly by the parish officers in seven years leases to the best bidder This way prevents collusion to the prejudice of the parish revenue and likewise prevents partiality.

Methinks I now behold the parish republics, like fraternal or benefit societies each met at quarter-day to pay their rents and to settle their accounts as well with the state as with all their parochial officers and workmen, their several accounts having been examined some days before.

On that day which is always a day, not, as now of sorrow, but of gladness, when the rents are all paid in, and the sum total proclaimed, the first account to be settled is the demand made by the national representation of so much per pound in behalf of the state, which sum is set apart to be sent to the national treasury. Another sum is also set apart for the parish treasury to answer contingencies till next quarter-day. Next the salaries of the parish officers are paid. Then are paid the respective bills of their workmen as masons, bricklayers, carpenters, glaziers, painters, &c. who have been employed in building or repairing the houses and other parish buildings. After these come the paviors, lamplighters, watchmen, scavengers, and all the other work-people employed by the parish, to receive their demands, until none remain. Then the residue of the public money or rents after all public demands are thus satisfied, which is always two-thirds, more or less, of the whole sum collected, comes lastly to be disposed of, which is the most pleasant part of the business to every one. The number of parishioners, and the sum thus left to be divided among them being announced, each, without respect of persons is sent home joyfully with an equal share.

So if by sickness or mischance,
To poverty some wane,
Their dividend of rents will come,
To set them up again.

Though

Though I have only spoke of parishioners receiving dividends, which may be understood as if men only were meant to share the residue of the rents, yet I would have no objection, if the people thought proper, to divide it among the whole number of souls, male and female, married and single in a parish, from the infant of a day old to the second infantage of hoary hairs. For as all of every age, legitimate and illegitimate, have a right to live on the public common, and as that common, for the sake of cultivation, must be let out for rent, that rent, each, ought to be equally enjoyed by every human being, instead of the soil which they are thus deprived of.

But what makes this prospect yet more glorious is, that after this empire of right and reason is thus established it will stand for ever. Force and corruption attempting its downfall shall equally be baffled, and all other nations struck with wonder and admiration at its happiness and stability, shall follow the example; and thus the whole earth shall at last be happy and live like brethren.

FINIS

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